

INTRODUCTION

With the latest games consoles such as the Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3 constantly in the headlines, it's easy to forget that Windows PCs are among the most powerful gaming systems available. A gaming PC lets you play the latest games with stunning levels of graphical detail and surround sound, but to get the most enjoyment from them you'll also need a proper controller.

Arcade and action games can be played using a keyboard and mouse, but they can be so much easier to control using a proper joystick. Similarly, flight simulators become more engrossing when you use a joystick, and you'll get better lap times in driving games when you use a proper steering wheel and pedals.

Some games are designed to be played using a keyboard and mouse. Even then, though, using a proper gaming mouse lets you aim more accurately and rack up higher scores. This month, we've tested 20 of the best gaming controllers. With winners ranging in price from £18 to £67, there's something to suit every player.

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GAME FOR ANYTHING

Whether you prefer flight sims or driving games, our round-up of 20 joysticks, pads, mice and wheels will help give you total control of your gaming for as little as £13

Choosing a... Game Controller

The type of game controller that's right for you is going to depend on the type of games you play.

A joystick is great for flying games, for example, but it is almost useless for action titles. Whichever type of controller you want, this guide will help you figure out what you need to look for.

MICE DREAM

Gaming mice are ideal if you play first-person shooter (FPS) games. They have a higher sensitivity, measured in dots per inch (dpi), than standard mice, which means that your hand movements are more accurately relayed to the game. All the mice in this review have a sensitivity of at least 1,800dpi.

Joypads are ideal if you play arcade or action games. Most have a four-way directional pad, two analogue control sticks, four main buttons and four shoulder buttons. If you like to play driving games, look for a pad with analogue trigger controls. These are great for controlling the accelerator and brake of a car. Saitek's and Microsoft's joypads are wireless, so you can play without the restriction of a cable, but you will need batteries.

JOY DIVISION

Joysticks are ideal for flight simulators. A good joystick should have lots of buttons, a throttle and a point-of-view (POV) hat control to let you look around the cockpit. Many also have a rudder control. A cheaper joystick might suffice for arcade flying games, but for simulator fans dozens of buttons and controls will make the experience more realistic.

You can play driving games with a joypad, but a steering wheel makes them far more realistic. Some have force feedback, so you physically have to wrestle with the wheel when you lose control of your car. Most sets allow you to change gears using a pair of paddle controls behind the wheel, but two of the wheels in this review include a separate gearstick and a clutch pedal.

X RATED

As well as products designed for PC use, we've included two wireless Xbox 360 controllers in this test. They're ideal if you own an Xbox 360 as well as a PC. However, to use them you'll also need to buy the Xbox 360 Wireless Gaming Receiver for Windows. This connects to a USB port and costs around £15.

GAMING HARDWARE: MICE

LOGITECH G5 Laser Mouse

★★★★★

£44 inc VAT

Logitech's G5 Laser Mouse is the most expensive gaming mouse in the group. It's not unusually shaped, so only the unusual textured pattern on top lets you know this isn't a standard mouse. The mouse wheel rotates in clear steps, so it's ideal for changing weapons.

Two small buttons adjust the mouse's sensitivity. An indicator on the left side of the mouse shows the current dpi setting, but this is obscured by your hand when playing. The side buttons have little travel or feedback, so you're never certain whether you've actually pressed them.

The underside of the mouse is better thought out. Large Teflon pads make it glide smoothly across the desk and a button releases a small cartridge from inside. This can hold up to eight tiny weights, each weighing 1.7g or 4.5g, so you can customise the mouse's total weight. The supplied software isn't as flexible as that included with Razer's DeathAdder.

This is a decent mouse, but its poor side buttons and high price make it average value.



LASER MOUSE Wired connection, USB interface, six buttons, 2,000dpi PART CODE 910-000094

SUPPLIER www.komplett.co.uk
DETAILS www.logitech.com

- ✓ Adjustable weights
- ✗ Poor side buttons; expensive

MICROSOFT Habu

★★★★★

£34 inc VAT

Microsoft's Habu is made in conjunction with Razer, manufacturer of the DeathAdder. The mouse wheel and edges glow a soft blue, but you can switch this off if it annoys you. The two buttons behind the mouse wheel usually adjust the resolution, but can be assigned to other functions using the excellent Razer configuration software. Getting the utility to run under Vista was a pain, though, and required several updates.

The Habu comes with two interchangeable sets of left-hand side buttons. One set has bigger buttons, which are set further forward for easy use, and the other has them set further back and out of the way. The mouse is very comfortable to use for long periods and slides smoothly across the desk. It doesn't have adjustable weights, however, so if you like a heavy mouse you should look at Saitek's GM3200 instead.

This is a good mouse with excellent software, but others in the group are better. Saitek's GM3200 is cheaper and more customisable, and the DeathAdder has better side buttons.



LASER MOUSE Wired connection, USB interface, six buttons, 2,000dpi PART CODE 9VV-00003

SUPPLIER www.pixmania.co.uk
DETAILS www.microsoft.co.uk

- ✓ Excellent software
- ✗ Tricky to get working in Vista

RAPTOR GAMING M3

★★★★★

£32 inc VAT

Raptor Gaming's M3 has an unusual shape that fans out on either side to keep your thumb and little finger off the desk. This works well, but the mouse wasn't quite big enough for us to use comfortably. The extra surface area also means that it doesn't slide as smoothly as most here.

The mouse wheel is small and doesn't turn in clearly defined steps. Behind it is a button that activates sensitivity adjustment. After clicking this, you use the mouse wheel and an LED indicator to adjust the setting. This process is too long-winded to be useful during a game.

The rear casing of the mouse detaches from the rest of the body to reveal a slot for weights. Eight are supplied, ranging from 2.5g up to 20g, but the Logitech and Saitek mice can both be made heavier than the M3.

The supplied software has most of the features you'd want, but it's still nowhere near as flexible and easy to use as Razer's software. Despite the M3's bold design and adjustable weights, we prefer the DeathAdder.



LASER MOUSE Wired connection, USB interface, five buttons, 2,000dpi PART CODE 511

SUPPLIER www.yoyotech.co.uk
DETAILS www.raptor-gaming.com

- ✓ Adjustable weights
- ✗ Doesn't slide as smoothly as some

RAZER DeathAdder

★★★★★

£40 inc VAT



Razer's DeathAdder is similar in design to Microsoft's Habu, but its wheel is more pronounced and easier to use. The side buttons are excellent, with plenty of travel and a definite click, and a button on the bottom lets you switch between five pre-configured custom control setups.

The DeathAdder has no extra buttons for adjusting the sensitivity settings during a game, but the superb Razer software allows you to assign sensitivity control, or even a specific setting, to any button. The software also allows you to adjust a wide range of motion and button options, including command macros. It's an excellent utility, and it makes the DeathAdder a great choice if you like to tweak game controls to suit you.

The DeathAdder slides smoothly across the desk, but it's very light and has no adjustable weights, so those looking for a heavier mouse should get Saitek's GM3200 instead. It's a little more expensive than Microsoft's similar Habu, but we'd recommend paying a little extra for the DeathAdder's excellent buttons.



LASER MOUSE Wired connection, USB interface, five buttons, 1,800dpi PART CODE RZ01 00150100 R2M1

SUPPLIER www.afterhours.co.uk
DETAILS www.razerzone.com

- ✓ Excellent software
- ✗ Expensive

SAITEK GM3200 Laser Mouse

★★★★★

£23 inc VAT

Saitek's GM3200 Laser Mouse has the highest sensitivity of any mouse here, but costs just £23 including VAT, making it a bargain. When testing it, though, we didn't notice that it was any smoother than the other models. You can adjust the sensitivity using a rocking switch just behind the wheel, and LEDs on the side indicate the current setting.

The GM3200 is big, so will suit those with larger hands. On the bottom are two reversible covers that let you adjust the size of the Teflon pads and the amount that the mouse slides on the pad. Below these are seven removable weights, but even with them all removed this mouse weighs more than the DeathAdder.

The GM3200's software is limited, with basic button configuration and sensitivity options only. It has two configurable modes, though, and you can switch between them using a button on top of the mouse.

This is a good buy if you prefer a heavier mouse or are on a tight budget, but the DeathAdder is better.



LASER MOUSE Wired connection, USB interface, six buttons, 3,200dpi PART CODE PM27AB

SUPPLIER www.scan.co.uk
DETAILS www.saitek.com/uk

- ✓ Adjustable weights; cheap
- ✗ Poor software

Labs verdict Gaming mice

The five gaming mice proved the hardest peripherals to test. Each one of the mice here is a significant improvement over the standard optical mice supplied with most computers, and when using one you should see your scores rise immediately.

Saitek's GM3200 is the cheapest mouse here by far, and costs just £23 including VAT. Despite this low price, it's an excellent choice for those who want a more accurate mouse. It's heavy, which helps with precise shooting, and has a high sensitivity. It's also rather large, though, so those with smaller hands should give it a miss.

Microsoft's Habu and Razer's DeathAdder are both excellently designed gaming mice. They feel comfortable in most hands, and both include an excellent software utility that's far better than that of any rival product. The software can set every imaginable parameter, so it's ideal if you like to tinker with your controls. It's hard to choose between them, because they are so similar, but the DeathAdder has better side buttons and, unlike the Habu, works flawlessly in Windows Vista. It's a great gaming mouse, and wins our Best Buy award.



RAZER
DeathAdder
★★★★★



LOGITECH ChillStream

★★★★★

£21 inc VAT

The design of Logitech's ChillStream closely resembles that of Microsoft's Xbox 360 controller. The buttons have the same layout and colours, plus there's an indicator to show which player number you are in multi-player games. The analogue triggers would benefit from a bit more travel, but are perfectly sprung. The analogue sticks are excellent, with just enough resistance to make them accurate without being tiring.

There are six air vents arranged around the grips of the pad, and a fan inside blows air through them as you play. A button allows you to disable the fan or choose one of two power settings. We found that the low setting was sufficient to keep your hands cool, while the high setting made a distracting whirring noise. It's an ingenious and unusual feature.

The ChillStream pad is a little on the small side, so it's slightly uncomfortable for those with big hands. If you have smaller hands it's a decent and inexpensive gamepad, but it's outclassed by the Xbox 360 wireless controller.



PC JOYPAD Two analogue pads, one directional pad, eight buttons, two triggers, wired connection, USB interface
PART CODE 963435-0914

SUPPLIER www.yoyotech.co.uk

DETAILS www.logitech.com

✓ Air cooling system

✗ A little small

MICROSOFT Xbox 360 Wireless Controller

★★★★★

£28 inc VAT



To use the Xbox 360 Wireless Controller on a PC you'll also need the Xbox 360 Wireless Gaming Receiver for Windows. Once that's installed, this joypad needs no further software or setup. Pushing the sync button connects it instantly.

This is by far the most comfortable pad to hold. The buttons have just the right resistance, and the triggers have plenty of travel and are perfectly sprung. The analogue joysticks are the best we've ever used, with subtle motions translated perfectly and no annoying dead zone in the centre.

This is the best joypad available, but at £28 plus £15 for the receiver it's also the priciest. If you want a wireless controller, it's ideal. If you are happy with wires and want to save some cash, the Xbox 360 Controller for Windows is identical but wired and costs just £23.

PC AND CONSOLE JOYPAD Two analogue pads, one directional pad, eight buttons, two triggers, rumble, RF wireless connection, USB interface, Xbox 360 compatible
PART CODE B4F-00002

SUPPLIER www.gameseek.co.uk

DETAILS www.xbox.com

✓ Comfortable design; wireless

✗ Expensive

SAITEK P2900 Wireless

★★★★★

£22 inc VAT

Saitek's P2900 is a wireless controller, so you can sit as far away from your PC as you like. It's easy to set up: after installing the software, plug it in and press the sync button. The joypad uses a single AA battery, which Saitek claims will last for 50 hours of gameplay.

The pad is very wide, so doesn't feel that comfortable to hold. It has no analogue trigger controls, either, so it's not great for driving games. However, it does have a special mode for playing first-person shooter (FPS) games. Once activated, the right-hand analogue stick acts as the mouse, so you can play any FPS game using the joypad. It takes a little getting used to, and you won't be able to compete with a mouse-equipped competitor, but for single-player games it works well enough.

The P2900 Wireless is inexpensive, easy to use and great for FPS titles. With no trigger controls, though, it's of limited use for other game genres.



PC JOYPAD Two analogue pads, one directional pad, 10 buttons, RF wireless connection, USB interface
PART CODE P2900

SUPPLIER www.eclipsecomputers.com

DETAILS www.saitek.com/uk

✓ Works with all FPS games; wireless

✗ No analogue triggers

THRUSTMASTER Run'N'Drive

★★★★

£20 inc VAT

The Run'N'Drive has an unusual analogue controller around the directional pad. It's sprung, and rotates by around 45° in each direction. You can use this as a steering wheel in driving games. It works quite well, and makes an interesting alternative to using an analogue stick for the same job.

The pad is easy to set up, and drivers for Windows XP and Vista are supplied. It also works with PlayStation 2 and PlayStation 3 consoles. Unfortunately, the analogue joysticks are too close together and we regularly found our thumbs colliding when using both at once. The triangular analogue trigger controls are too small and too springy, making them tiring to hold for long periods. The pad has a rumble function, though, so you get vibration feedback in both PC and PlayStation 2 games.

The extra analogue controller and rumble are both good ideas, but we didn't like the analogue sticks or triggers on this pad. It's cheap, but it's not a good buy.



PC AND CONSOLE JOYPAD Two analogue pads, one directional pad, eight buttons, two triggers, rumble, wired connection, USB interface, PlayStation 2, PlayStation 3 compatible
PART CODE 2960686

SUPPLIER www.game.co.uk

DETAILS www.thrustmaster.com

✓ Rumble; PlayStation compatible

✗ Poor analogue sticks

TRUST Predator GM1500

★★★

£13 inc VAT

Trust's Predator is very small. Its stubby grips barely touched our palms, and our fingers wrapped right around it, well past the buttons. It's fine for children, but extremely uncomfortable if you're an adult with big hands. It works immediately with either Windows XP or Vista, and as it connects as a standard joypad no extra software is included or needed.

The analogue sticks are very small and lack the resistance necessary to help you make precise motions. The directional pad is soft with limited motion and no feedback, and the buttons are similar. There are no analogue triggers, so it's not ideal for racing games, and the shoulder buttons feel spongy when pressed. You can program macros and assign them to individual keys, but the process is fiddly. The pad can vibrate, but only when used with a PlayStation 2.

This pad is inexpensive and might suffice for children, but we recommend saving up for the ChillStream or Xbox 360 pads instead.



PC AND CONSOLE JOYPAD Two analogue pads, one directional pad, 10 buttons, wired connection, USB interface, PlayStation 2 compatible
PART CODE 14863

SUPPLIER www.amazon.co.uk

DETAILS www.trust.com

✓ PlayStation 2 compatible

✗ Poor analogue sticks

Labs verdict Gaming joypads

A joypad is essential for many of today's games, and they're particularly good if you want to play platform, sport or driving games. At first glance, the five pads here look similar, but we found that some were vastly better to use than others.

For those with sweaty palms, Logitech's ChillStream is a great good choice. It has the same basic layout as Microsoft's pad, but it's not quite as comfortable to use for long periods. Unlike many gimmicks the air cooling really does work, and at only £21 including VAT it's very affordable. If you mainly want to play FPS games, the Saitek P2900's FPS mode is a decent alternative, although it's less suited to other genres.

The best joypad here, though, is the Xbox 360 Wireless Controller. It's expensive and you'll need a receiver to go with it, but as soon as you pick it up you'll realise why we chose it. It works flawlessly, and its every curve and button fits into your hands perfectly. It's our Best Buy. If you want to spend less than the wired version is an excellent alternative.



**MICROSOFT
Xbox 360
Wireless Controller**

★★★★★



LOGITECH Attack 3

★★★★

£15 inc VAT

Logitech's Attack 3 is the smallest joystick in the group. This is good if desk space is limited or if you need a joystick only for occasional use, such as when flying the planes and helicopters in Battlefield 2. The design is simple, ambidextrous and comfortable to use even for long periods.

The joystick has a well-considered amount of resistance, making motions precise without being tiring. The small base tends to tip up from the desk when you make a sudden move, but it is nothing a little Blu-Tack can't fix. There's no rudder control, so this joystick is suitable only for arcade-style games with simple controls.

As well as a basic trigger, there are four buttons on top of the joystick, but there's no point-of-view (POV) hat control. This makes the joystick unsuitable for games where you need to look around to spot enemies or landmarks as you fly.

This is a decent joystick, but it lacks too many features. We'd recommend spending a little more on Saitek's Aviator.



PC JOYSTICK 11 buttons, one throttle control, USB interface PART CODE 963291-0914
SUPPLIER www.yoyotech.co.uk
DETAILS www.logitech.com
✓ Cheap; ambidextrous
✗ No POV hat or rudder control; small, unstable base

LOGITECH Extreme 3D Pro

★★★★★

£22 inc VAT

Logitech's larger joystick has none of the stability problems suffered by the Attack 3. The wide base keeps it flat on the desktop during all but the most frantic gameplay. The stick itself has a little more resistance. This makes holding precise banking turns easier, but it does also make it more tiring to use over long periods.

The buttons on the base don't have enough travel or feedback, and on occasions we thought we'd lowered the landing gear on our plane only to find out we hadn't. The throttle is easy to use, however, and the joystick twists to give you rudder control. The top of the stick holds a POV hat and five buttons, as well as a basic trigger. It's very comfortable to hold, but the design isn't suitable for left-handed pilots. Logitech's configuration software is excellent and it allows you to assign any keyboard command or macro to any button.

The Extreme 3D Pro is a great joystick, with its stability and throttle making it ideal for fast-paced dogfights.



PC JOYSTICK 12 buttons, one throttle control, one hat, rudder control, USB interface PART CODE 963290-0914
SUPPLIER www.yoyotech.co.uk
DETAILS www.logitech.com
✓ Very stable; rudder control
✗ Poor base buttons

SAITEK Aviator

★★★★★

£18 inc VAT

While the Extreme 3D Pro looks like it's been taken from a spaceship, the Aviator has a more realistic design. It has two throttle levers on its front, so it's ideal for flying aircraft with several throttle engines. Alternatively, you can push in a button and the two throttles move as one. It has a small base, and we found some Blu-Tack was needed to hold it steady.

The base holds four two-way toggle switches. There's also a mode switch, so you can customise different control set-ups and switch mid-game. This allows you, for instance, to have one set of controls customised for take-off and landing, and another for controlling weapons during combat.

The joystick has a fairly light movement, so your hand won't get tired during long flights. Of the three buttons on the stick, one is a missile button. It has a safety cover and glows red, which is silly but great fun. There's also a POV hat and rudder control.

This is an excellent joystick at a great price.



PC JOYSTICK 12 buttons, two throttle controls, one hat, rudder control, USB interface PART CODE PS33
SUPPLIER www.yoyotech.co.uk
DETAILS www.saitek.com
✓ Ambidextrous; twin throttle; rudder control
✗ Small, unstable base

THRUSTMASTER HOTAS Cougar

★★★★★

£128 inc VAT

Thrustmaster's Cougar is a replica of the F-16 fighter's joystick and throttle, and its all-metal construction makes it feel like Thrustmaster has ripped it from a cockpit.

The array of controls is absolutely mind-blowing, with more switches, buttons and knobs than anything we've ever seen. Even more intimidating is the supplied software for customising your control setup. This includes a powerful scripting language, complete with its own 184-page manual. Fortunately, there's a simple setup tool as well, and you can download pre-made custom control scripts for most flight simulators from fan websites.

There's no rudder control, as a set of rudder pedals is sold separately, but you can map the rudder to one of the controls on the throttle for the time being.

The Cougar will divide people into two camps: some will think it's ludicrously over the top, and others will be amazed. If you fall into the latter camp, and you clock up lots of virtual flight hours, it might be worth forking out for.



PC JOYSTICK Seven buttons, three throttle controls, six hats, USB interface PART CODE 2960534
SUPPLIER www.pixmania.co.uk
DETAILS www.thrustmaster.com
✓ Amazing build quality; lots of controls
✗ Very expensive; needs pedals too

TRUST Predator GM-2550

★★★

£17 inc VAT

Trust's Predator uses four suction cups to hold itself to your desk. These hold it steady for a while, but we found that they tended to come unstuck.

They also make it difficult to secure using blobs of Blu-Tack. The stick has good resistance, making it easy to be precise when manoeuvring, but the grip is designed so that you hold the joystick with only two fingers. This can make your hand ache after a while. The extra trigger at the bottom is far too sensitive to rest your little finger on.

There are four buttons and a POV hat on top, and the joystick twists to give rudder control. The six buttons on the base are in a long row, making it hard to know which one you're pressing without looking.

There's no software provided, as the Predator functions as a default joystick in Windows. This means that you don't have the same level of control customisation as the other joysticks in the group. The Aviator, which costs just £1 more, is far better.



PC JOYSTICK 12 buttons, one throttle control, one hat, rudder control, USB interface PART CODE 15077
SUPPLIER www.amazon.co.uk
DETAILS www.trust.com
✓ Rudder control
✗ Unstable; uncomfortable to hold

Labs verdict Gaming joysticks

Joysticks are much less versatile than joypads, so you should think carefully about what features you need from one. After clocking up considerable hours in the cockpit we chose three, one of which should suit your needs.

The best choice is Saitek's Aviator. It's ambidextrous and has more control options than we'd expect for under £20, including twin throttles, a mode switch and easy-to-use toggle switches. If you're looking for a joystick for lazy bi-plane joyrides or for precise modern air-to-air combat, the Aviator is great. It's our Best Buy.

If you prefer to play arcade flight simulators, though, you should consider Logitech's Extreme 3D Pro instead. It costs a little more, but its throttle is placed at the rear of the base, making it easy to grab during hectic arcade dogfights.

Finally, if you take your flight simulators very, very seriously, choose Thrustmaster's Cougar. It's ludicrously expensive, but it feels realistic and has dozens of useful controls. Obsessive flight simulator fans will need to spend even more to add some rudder pedals, though.

BEST BUY
COMPUTER SHOPPER
**SAITEK
Aviator**
★★★★★



LOGITECH G25

★★★★★

£147 inc VAT

Logitech's G25 is easily the most expensive steering wheel here, but you can see where the extra cash has gone. The wheel itself is leather covered, so you can get a good grip. It also has the biggest turning circle and it clamps to the desktop very securely.

There are only two buttons and two paddles on the wheel, but the separate gearstick unit has plenty more. The gearstick can be switched between two systems: one that allows you to change up and down, and one with six selectable gears. There are even three pedals, so you can use a clutch if you want. All the pedals are firmly sprung and the base doesn't slip backwards when used.

This wheel was our favourite to use. It's easier to turn than Thrustmaster's RGT, so it's less tiring over long sessions. The force feedback is well judged, kicking in when you expect it to rather than constantly fighting you for control. It is the best wheel here, but it's too expensive.



PC WHEEL Three pedals, six gears, 10 buttons, two paddles, force feedback, wired connection, USB interface
PART CODE 963416-0120
SUPPLIER www.dabs.com
DETAILS www.logitech.com

- ✓ Gearstick; accurate steering
- ✗ Very expensive

MICROSOFT Xbox 360 Wireless Racing Wheel

★★★

£71 inc VAT

This steering wheel requires the Xbox 360 Wireless Gaming Receiver for Windows to connect to your PC. It also needs a mains power connection. It can be used on your lap or clamped to a table. The desktop clamp isn't very firm, so the wheel rocked a little during use. The directional pad and buttons are easily reachable while you're racing. There are two paddles for switching gears, but there's no gearstick.

The wheel provides force feedback when used with an Xbox 360, but not with a PC. The wheel also has a rather large dead zone, which makes straightening up after a corner much harder than it should be.

The pedals are lightly sprung and easy to depress, but this makes it harder to be precise when easing back on the power. The foot rest in front doesn't work very well, either. Other wheels in the group are far better than this one.



PC AND CONSOLE WHEEL Two pedals, six buttons, two paddles, force feedback, RF wireless connection, Xbox 360 compatible, USB interface
PART CODE 9Z1-00009
SUPPLIER www.dabs.com
DETAILS www.xbox.com

- ✓ Can be used on your lap
- ✗ No force feedback; large dead zone

SAITEK R440 Force

★★★★★

£40 inc VAT

The R440 Force's clamp held it to our desktop like a vice, with no sign of movement even through the trickiest chicanes. There's no directional pad on the wheel and only four buttons, but these are well positioned and easy to reach during a race. You'll have to use the paddles to change gear, and they don't click that well when you change up or down.

The wheel is fairly accurate, and we managed some good lap times, but we were constantly fighting the overenthusiastic force feedback mechanism. It seems to kick in at the slightest provocation, so racing can be tiring.

The two pedals are made from plastic and lever downwards rather than titling back. They work well, but lack the big springs that make the pedals on the RGT and G25 sets more realistic and precise.

The lightly sprung pedals and constant force feedback make this a fun choice for kids, but most users should spend a little more and get the RGT instead.



PC WHEEL Two pedals, four buttons, two paddles, force feedback, wired connection, USB interface
PART CODE PW16V
SUPPLIER www.pixmania.co.uk
DETAILS www.saitek.com

- ✓ Accurate steering
- ✗ Tiring force feedback

THRUSTMASTER RGT Force Feedback Pro

★★★★★

£67 inc VAT



Once clamped to the desktop, the RGT Force Feedback Pro hangs far out over the edge, making it easier to get a comfortable driving position. The wheel has seven buttons and a directional pad on it. Behind the wheel are four paddles. Two are for changing gears, and make a nice clicking noise when pulled. The other two are analogue, so you can use them as an accelerator and brake.

The pedals provided are excellent. They're well sprung and give precise control over a car. The third pedal can be used as a clutch and the steering wheel has a gearstick. It's not as good as the six-speed gearbox on Logitech's wheel, but it allows you to shift up and down easily.

The wheel is heavier to turn than the G25's, so it can be tiring during long races. Still, this does make it easier to hold a precise line through long sweeping bends. The force feedback is well judged, too.

This is a great wheel at an excellent price.



PC WHEEL Three pedals, two gears, nine buttons, four paddles, force feedback, wired connection, USB interface
PART CODE 2960687
SUPPLIER www.wizardprice.com
DETAILS www.thrustmaster.com

- ✓ Gearstick; accurate steering
- ✗ Wheel is a little heavy

TRUST Predator GM-3400

★★★★

£20 inc VAT

Trust's Predator GM-3400 attaches to your desk using four sucker cups and a clamp, which combine to make it totally immobile during use. There are plenty of buttons on the wheel and two paddles for gear changes, but they all feel rather spongy.

The Predator doesn't support proper force feedback, but it does include a more basic rumble system. The wheel shakes when the car is skidding or gets hit, but it doesn't actually try to twist in your hands. The pedals are rather small and don't have much spring or travel.

We found it hard to drive using the GM-3400. There's a large dead zone in its centre, so you have to turn the wheel considerably before the car starts to react. You have to turn the wheel a long way to get round tighter corners, too, which is tiring, and this doesn't help you to produce good lap times.

At just £20 including VAT, this is a very inexpensive wheel, but it's not much fun to use.



PC AND CONSOLE WHEEL Two pedals, 10 buttons, two paddles, wired connection, USB interface, PlayStation 2 compatible
PART CODE 15147
SUPPLIER www.amazon.co.uk
DETAILS www.trust.com

- ✓ Cheap; works with PlayStation 2
- ✗ No force feedback; poor pedals

Labs verdict Gaming steering wheels

The steering wheel group was one of the most fun to test, and we spent a lot of hours whipping around race tracks in a variety of cars. There are wheels here to suit every budget, but a few are laps ahead of the others.

Logitech's G25 is a great steering wheel. It feels like it came straight from a real car, and its separate six-speed gearstick and excellent pedals make for an extremely realistic driving experience. If you spend a lot of time playing racing games, or play simulation-style games that require a proper gearstick with many gears, it's a good choice. If not, however, it's just too expensive to recommend.

Thrustmaster's RGT Force Feedback Pro is far better value and has all the features you'll need to enjoy racing games, including a simple gearstick. Its steering accuracy and force feedback are great, and the extra analogue paddles are useful if your feet get tired of holding down the accelerator or brake pedals. It's a great wheel at a good price, and our Best Buy. **ES**



THRUSTMASTER RGT Force Feedback Pro

★★★★★

